

## Antidegradation Policy

The antidegradation policy is one of the three components of water quality standards (i.e., designated uses, water quality criteria to protect those uses, and antidegradation policy).

Antidegradation refers to actions taken to maintain existing uses and water quality in the state's waters; it allows, in certain cases, lowering of water quality that exceeds "fishable/swimmable" and provides special protection to waters that constitute a national resource. The intent of the antidegradation policy is to protect and maintain the existing physical, biological, and chemical integrity of all waters of the state.

The following is a summary of the provisions antidegradation policy as it appears in the Water Quality Standards. This summary does not contain the exact language of the standards.

- **Existing Uses:** Existing surface water uses and the level of water quality necessary to protect the existing uses will be maintained and protected. Existing uses are defined as uses attained after November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1975.
- **Chemical integrity:** The state shall ensure adequate chemical quality to fully protect existing uses. For waterbodies where water quality exceeds the levels necessary to protect existing uses and waters designated as High Quality, water quality will be maintained at or above existing quality. But, the Environmental Protection Commission (EPC) may determine after public hearing that there is need to allow a lower chemical quality because of necessary and justifiable economic and social development.
- **Physical and biological integrity:** The existing uses of High Quality Resource waters will be protected one of two ways: (1) through maintaining water quality levels necessary to fully protect the existing uses, or (2) by improving water quality to levels necessary to meet the water quality criteria by preserving or enhancing the physical and biological integrity of these waters. Both involve the protection of such features of the water body as channel alignment, bed characteristics, water velocity, aquatic habitat, and aquatic species.
- **Border Rivers:** The Mississippi River and the Missouri River constitute waters of exceptional significance. Water quality management decisions will be made in consideration of the exceptional value of these resources.
- **Point and Nonpoint Sources:** There shall be achieved the highest statutory and regulatory requirements for all new and existing point sources, and feasible management and regulatory programs for all new and existing nonpoint sources.
- **Adverse Impacts to all waters:** Consistency with Iowa's water quality standards requires that any proposed activity modifying the existing physical, biological, or chemical integrity of a water of the state shall not adversely impact these resource

attributes. An adverse impact shall refer to the loss of or irreparable damage to the aquatic, semiaquatic or wildlife habitat or population, or a modification to the water body that would cause an overall degradation to the aquatic or wildlife population. Exceptions to the preceding will be allowed only if full mitigation is provided by the applicant and approved by the Department.

- **Adverse Impacts to high quality waters:** For those waters of the state designated as High Quality or High Quality Resource and the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, any proposed activity that will adversely impact the waterbody will not be consistent with Iowa's water quality standards. Mitigation will not be allowed except in highly unusual situations where no other project alternatives exist.
- **Exemptions:** This policy shall be applied in conjunction with water quality certification review pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act. In the event that activities are specifically exempted from permits issued by the DNR, the activity will be considered consistent with this policy. Activities not otherwise exempted will be subject to Department rules and this policy. The repair and maintenance of a drainage district ditch as defined in Chapter 70 of the Department Rules will not be considered a violation of the antidegradation policy for the purpose of implementing Title IV of these rules.
- **Nationwide and Regional Permits:** U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) nationwide permits 3-7, 12-23, 25, 27, 29-34, and 36-44 as promulgated March 9, 2000, are certified pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act. Regional permit numbers 2, 7, 12, and 20 of the Rock Island District of the Corps are also certified. No specific Corps permit or 401 certification is required for activities covered by these permits unless it is required by the nationwide permit or the Corps.

For a further discussion of High Quality and High Quality Resource use designations, please refer to Designated Uses of Iowa's Surface Waters.

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